North Dakota Joint Information Center
News Release

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Gov. Burgum and North Dakota Health, Water Officials: Camp Conditions Rapidly Deteriorating

Time Running Out Until Public Health and Environmental Disaster Occurs

BISMARCK, N.D. – While Dakota Access Pipeline protesters continue their cleanup efforts with help from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, state officials worry there's not enough progress being made to remove the waste before the area is inundated with water. Camp conditions are quickly deteriorating due to rapid spring melt and runoff. These wet conditions when combined with human waste and trash are creating a potential public health and environmental disaster.

Today, Maj. French Pope of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Headquarters Operations Center will visit the main protest camp – which lies on Corps-managed federal land – to assess the situation and determine what resources are needed to complete the environmental cleanup before potential major spring flooding arrives.

"With near-record high temperatures expected later this week and significant meltwater flooding already occurring, the situation grows increasingly unsafe by the day," Gov. Doug Burgum said. "Immediate action is needed to protect human life and prevent any further pollution of the Missouri and Cannonball rivers. Today's assessment by the Army Corps of Engineers is crucial to accelerating the cleanup process so this land can be properly cleared of garbage, structures, vehicles and human waste before it washes into the rivers. We cannot afford to wait any longer."

The National Weather Service reports that watersheds including the Knife, Heart, and Cannonball rivers should be on the watch for rising water levels and an increased risk of ice-related high water near the end of the week.

"As long as we have frozen ground and melting snow, the water is going to continue to rise in the camps," said Dave Glatt, Environmental Health Section chief for the state Department of Health. "They will have to double their efforts to remove the waste in a timely manner. Any protestors at the camp who refuse to move or intend to engage in criminal activity are only exacerbating a very delicate, dangerous situation for those who depend on the land and water."

Find this release and additional information related to the protest response at
http://ndresponse.gov/

In response to upcoming flooding on the Cannonball River, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), in cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers, will install a rapid deployment gauge on the Cannonball River Bridge within the next week. The self-contained stream gauge will provide water level data in the vicinity of Highway 1806 and the Cannonball River during the upcoming flood conditions. The gauge will assist in monitoring the snowmelt runoff, changes in the water levels on the Cannonball River and the potential occurrences of ice jams. The additional monitoring will assist in maintaining the safety of the public downstream.

“That area, by nature, is prone to flooding. The Cannonball River and the Cantepeta Creek, along with the Missouri River, all come together in the area of the protest camp, which is sitting down in the floodplain,” said State Engineer Garland Eberle with the State Water Commission. “We’ve historically seen ice jamming which causes a backup of flood water. If you’re really trying to protect the river, it is imperative we get that stuff cleaned up before we see a flood.”

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